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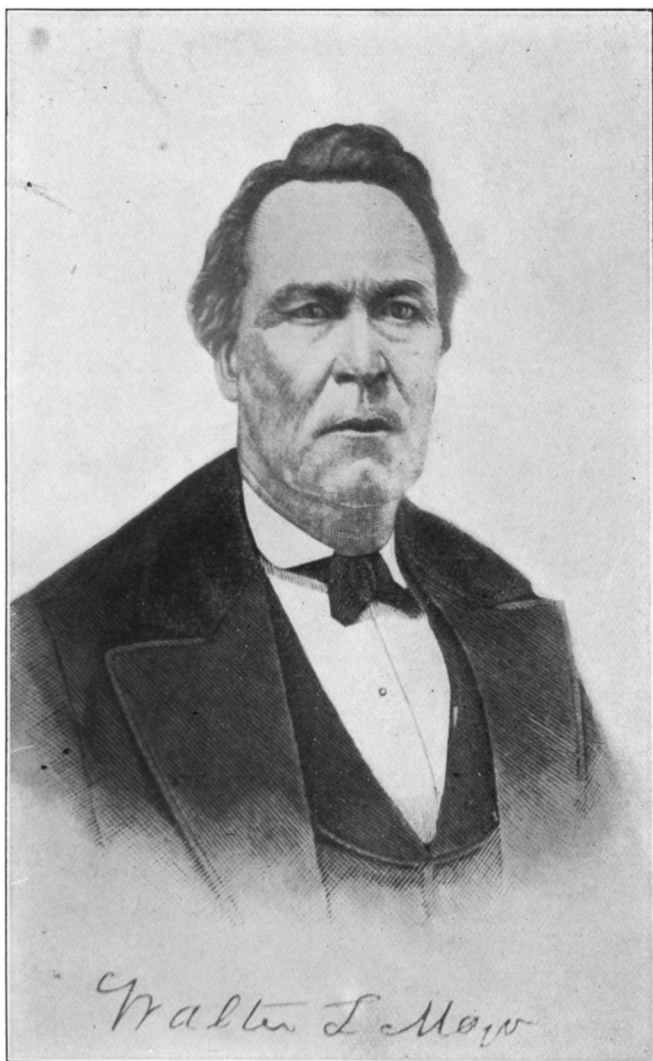
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WALTER L. MAYO, A PIONEER OF EDWARDS COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

BY WALTER COLYER.

At a special term of the county commissioners' court of Edwards county, Illinois, held on the 21st day of April, 1831, Walter L. Mayo, a young Virginia school teacher who had for a time resided in the neighborhood of Albion, and had shown considerable aptitude in figures, was appointed clerk of the court to fill out the unexpired term of one Jesse B. Brown, resigned. The coming of young Mayo into this English settlement at this opportune time when the affairs of the county were in a badly tangled condition was a fortunate circumstance, since it was mainly through his wonderful executive ability, his untiring energy, his unimpeachable honesty and his unceasing devotion to the best interests of the people that the name Edwards county became everywhere known as a synonym of law, order and good government.

Mr. Mayo was born in Albemarle county, Virginia, March 7th, 1810. His father, Lewis Mayo, was a planter, slave-owner and teacher. A nephew of Lewis Mayo was mayor of the city of Richmond just prior to the civil war. The father of Lewis Mayo, also named Lewis, was one of three brothers who came from England to America; and their genealogical table seems to indicate that they were of the same family with Rev. John Mayo who in the year 1639, settled at Barnstable, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He was the first pastor of the second church built in the city of Boston.

Walter L. Mayo was one of a family of five children—three sons and two daughters. One of these brothers, Samuel T. Mayo, settled at Carlinville, Illinois, where he

married the sister of John M. Palmer and became a widely known citizen. Walter L. early in life, having acquired a fair education, displayed an ambition to cut loose from the ideas of his early schooling and seek his own fortune in the country beyond the Alleghenies. Stopping first to visit an uncle at Tateville, Kentucky, he soon resumed his journey westward to Edwards county, Illinois. This occurred in the year 1828. Upon his arrival in the English settlement he found himself among strangers and without any bank account. He was soon given employment as a country teacher, boarding in the family of County Commissioner Hunt. The young teacher made himself useful outside of his school hours and through his adeptness in figures he was called upon to perform all the difficult calculations for the county. This finally led to his appointment to the office of county clerk, a position he continued to hold during the almost unprecedented period of 39 years. In the meantime he also held the offices of circuit clerk, probate judge and treasurer. Judge Mayo during all those years acted as the arbiter of the disputes that arose among the people, and it is notorious that he adjusted more difficulties between neighbors than did the courts. No one hesitated to seek his advice which was freely given without fee. Naturally of a genial, jovial, sympathetic disposition it not unfrequently happened that men went to him with their quarrels, estranged, and went away the best of friends. The result of this was seen in the small amount of litigation in the county and the fact that during more than 40 years no lawyer could earn a living within the bounds of Edwards county. With two terms of circuit court a year, courts have adjourned without a jury trial and grand juries have been discharged without the return of a single indictment. It was oftentimes within the province of Judge Mayo to issue a marriage license, and then to perform the marriage ceremony.

Soon after accepting the appointment to the office of county clerk, young Mayo tendered his services to the Governor to assist in quelling the Black Hawk Indian

outbreak, and he was promptly accepted and commissioned quartermaster for the battalion from Edwards and adjoining counties. His clerical qualifications especially fitted him for the work in that department. At the close of the Black Hawk war he returned and resumed his duties as county clerk.

Judge Mayo was thus referred to by George Flower in his *History of the English Settlement*:

"In the first years of the settlement, the public business of the county was rather loosely conducted, and the county deep in debt; but for the last twenty years public business has been punctually and promptly performed, and the records of the county kept in order for ready reference. This is due to the good administration of county affairs by Walter L. Mayo, Esq., who is said to be one of the best, if not the best, county clerks to be found in the State. The gatherings of the people from the country are now marked by decorum, quietude and respectability."

Never during his long official service did Mr. Mayo forget that he was a Virginian, and his conduct toward his fellow men was always that of a Virginia gentleman. He was warm and steadfast in his friendships, but he had small compassion for the man who would betray that friendship.

March 3d, 1834, Walter L. Mayo and Elizabeth Hall were united in marriage. The union resulted in a family of six children—Lewis, Florence, Alfred, Rosamond, Nellie and Alice. The two sons are dead, but the four daughters still survive. Mrs. Mayo was the daughter of William Hall, one of the early English colonists in Edwards county. William Hall raised a family of nine children, and all were educated beyond the standard of their day and generation. One of Mrs. Mayo's sisters became the wife of Rhymer Kohlsaatt, an honest German butcher at Albion whose sons are now so conspicuous in the great city by the lake in law, and journalism.

At the November election of 1870, Judge Mayo was elected on the Republican ticket to represent the 20th

district in the lower house of the twenty-seventh general assembly, in which body he made a creditable record as chairman of the committee on finance and as a member of the committees on legislative apportionment and revenue. In 1872, while the Judge was still a member of the Illinois legislature, his family removed to Leavenworth, Kansas, where resided the eldest daughter whose husband, Major Hopkins, was warden of the federal penitentiary. Although residing with his family at Leavenworth, Mr. Mayo continued to call Albion his home; and it was there that he exercised the rights of citizenship. During the years of his public service he had by careful saving and prudent investment, accumulated a competency which no one begrudged him, for all admitted it was well and honestly earned. A goodly share of this wealth was in the keeping of the First National Bank of Olney, Illinois, an institution in which he was a director and with the business affairs of which he was quite generally understood to be thoroughly familiar. This brings us to the sad and closing chapter in the life of Walter L. Mayo.

Judge Mayo died the victim of assassins. The story of his death, the names of the guilty fiends and the place of his burial are sealed mysteries, scarcely less mysterious to-day than they were the day the deed was committed more than 34 years ago.

On Friday, January 17th, 1878, Judge Mayo departed from Leavenworth for Olney, whither he went to attend a meeting of the bank directors. His safe arrival at St. Louis the next morning was noted on the register of the Laclede hotel where he always sojourned when in that city. He left the hotel at about six o'clock the same evening for the Union Station where he entered a coach on the old O. & M. road en route to Olney. It is known beyond question that he got aboard the train and that he arrived on the Illinois side of the river about seven o'clock, but after that all is a blank. The bank meeting was held on the following Thursday, and not until then was Mrs. Mayo apprised of the fact of his disappearance. This information first came

in the form of a telegram from the bank officials to the Mayo family asking an explanation for his non-appearance. The answer was returned that he had left home for Olney on the Friday previous. To this the bank officials replied that they knew absolutely nothing of his whereabouts; and then the first serious alarm of foul play was aroused. The valise and cane of the missing man were carried on to Cincinnati and returned to St. Louis. The son, Lewis Mayo, now deceased, but then and for years succeeding one of the best known citizens of Leavenworth, went immediately to St. Louis where every possible effort was made to discover some clue that would give light, but all without results. Beyond the fact that a great crime had been committed nothing was positively known. That he was either murdered outright or else carried away into captivity no one doubted, for he was not the man to desert his family and go into hiding from his friends. And that he took no wealth with him was positively known. There were theories advanced without number. It appeared reasonably certain that a crime had been committed while crossing the bridge. Some investigators surmised that the body had been thrown into the river. Others that it was dumped into Cahokia creek, while a respectable number believed and still believe the body was cremated in the furnace of the boiler. Yet others held that the victim was thrown from the eastern approach to the bridge and carried away by accomplices into captivity, possibly to be held for a ransom. Cahokia creek back of the old Relay house in East St. Louis was dragged in the hope that the body might be found; experienced detectives were employed and telegrams flew over the country. The theory of robbery, so often advanced, was scouted by his family and friends who knew that he never carried arms and would be the last man to offer resistance if he fell into the hands of highwaymen. Suicide, which some suggested, had no basis of probability, since he was not of that morose or melancholy nature which begets self destruction. Moreover, his financial affairs were in a prosperous condition

and his family relations the most congenial, and nothing could be presented that would suggest the idea of self destruction. Unquestionably the most plausible theory was that of abduction, but now after the lapse of years nothing has developed to substantiate such a theory. For years afterward his family would not have been surprised to receive propositions purporting to come from Mr. Mayo that money was required for his release, or that upon payment of a certain sum his family might hope to receive information of great importance to them. In fact, they rather expected that letters of this nature would come to them in after years. However, in this last hope they were doomed to suffer disappointment. In the course of a letter written by Lewis Mayo and addressed to the author of this sketch February 5th, 1889, he said:

"As a matter of fact, I have felt for years that father's disappearance was due to the fact that certain parties desired him out of the way, and that to make sure of it took means to accomplish that end which resulted in his death. I am not clear that it was the desire or intent of such parties to murder him, but believe in order to be sure that he did not trouble them at Olney they employed parties at St. Louis or rather led certain ones to think there was a chance to make a raise in an easy manner, not caring what they did so he was made away with, and that the active parties had not knowledge of the actual facts, but took chances for gain, with possibly a fee if he was heard of no more. That they performed well their work long years attest. I have often dreamed of seeing him, but never yet have I been near enough in my dreams to talk to him. Over and over again have I seen him coming down the street as in years before, but always to wake up when he was just within speaking distance. The thought that possibly he was still in some out of the way place I cannot entertain, because what leads men to such deeds is money or promise of gain, and any one mean enough to do such a thing would I imagine endeavor to make more out of it, particularly so since some of the principal parties

engaged in it, as I think, are not now in shape to take care of themselves—too busy attending to furnaces way below. Our experience with detectives leads me to think that we might as well have dispensed with them entirely, except for the fact that one cannot feel that he has done his duty without having the experience. I am now well satisfied that we had in our employ men who reported our every act to the guilty parties, thereby making it possible to anticipate each move and checkmate us. We did everything we could think of to at least find out what the truth was, if no more, and always something would happen. Convicts in penitentiaries would escape when we were getting what promised to be the revelation of the true story; or detectives would say it was no use to go further in a certain way and just quit, so what happened, we never knew and can only surmise. I feel quite sure he never left the bridge alive, or at least was thrown off the east approach near the river and there cared for by parties paid for it. Now who could have had any interest in the disappearance but those folks who feared he had knowledge of their own guilt?"

That a great crime was committed was conclusively proven, as when efforts were being made to ferret out the mystery upon more than one occasion the investigators were warned to desist. For instance, when some months afterward two prominent citizens of Southern Illinois were in Springfield doing detective work and were passing after dark en route from the Leland hotel to the state house they were held up by unknown men under the over-head railway crossing and warned that if they proceeded further with their investigation they, too, would go the way of Mayo. As to who the instigators of the crime were, there is slender reason to doubt, but it is not the part of wisdom to mention names in this sketch. That the guilty ones are now all dead is reasonably certain.

So general and so genuine was the grief over the disappearance of Judge Mayo throughout Edwards and adjoining counties that it was deemed proper all should join in some public expression of their feeling of abhorrence of

the great crime. Accordingly on March 9th, 1878, a great mass meeting was held for the purpose of taking some suitable action expressive of the general sorrow. Addresses were delivered commemorative of the virtues of the missing man and a committee of prominent citizens was appointed to draft suitable resolutions. This committee reported at the second meeting held the following Tuesday when a long series of resolutions were presented and adopted which for their pathos and heart-felt expressions of grief have been rarely equaled. The preamble recited, That, "Whereas, in the dispensations of Divine Providence, our community has been called upon to suffer so severely by the mysterious removal of Walter L. Mayo, who was so intimately connected with us for more than forty-five years; and as it becomes us to express our estimation of him and to offer our sympathies to his afflicted family in their sore distress, therefore, be it resolved," etc. It was finally Resolved, that "we will spare no efforts on our parts to trace out what has become of him; and that as one means we will invoke Him without whom no sparrow can fall to the ground; to make the truth and the facts known to his relatives to comfort withal through His providence and grace all who mourn this privation of husband, father, brother and friend."

It might be mentioned in passing that the last will and testament of Walter L. Mayo was probated in the probate court of Edwards county, June 25th, 1878. It was written July 16th, 1849, and bequeathed the entire estate of the testator to his wife.

Mrs. Walter L. Mayo passed over and beyond the veil of mysteries at her home in Leavenworth, January 9th, 1899, in her 88th year. She was a cultured christian woman, widely read in literature and a writer of both prose and poetry of no mean ability. She was deeply interested in all moves that had for their object the betterment and the up-building of humanity. Words are incapable of expressing the grief and bitter anguish of her latter years, hoping against hope that something would

yet transpire to lift at least in part the dark cloud and heavy burden. I can not do better in closing than to quote from a letter written by the eldest daughter, Mrs. Florence Mayo Hopkins, of Leavenworth, so recently as February 28th, 1912.:

"The awful tragedy is still shrouded in mystery. The dark cloud hanging over us for so many years has never been lifted. As our dear mother so pathetically expressed the attitude of the remaining years of her life, it is still—

" 'To wait, to watch, to listen,
To turn to the opening door,
To welcome a well-known footstep
Returning—never more.
To wait, to watch, to listen,
To sit in dumb despair,
Like a ghost in the evening twilight,
Still waits the empty chair.
To wait, to watch, to listen,
For a voice that calleth me,
As a dream when one awaketh—
So shall the meeting be.' "

Albion, Ill.

WALTER COLYER.

A Letter From the Daughter of Walter L. Mayo

.219 N. Broadway, Leavenworth, Kan.
March 19, 1912.

WALTER COLYER, ESQ.
Albion, Illinois.

Dear Friend:—Yours of March 13th is received. I certainly appreciate the interest you have shown in Father's career, and I would be pleased to render you whatever assistance possible. I know that he was warmly attached to the people of Edwards county,—he never forgot their friendship and kindness when he came, a mere stripling, to live among them. We have always lived in the North,